

by D. J. H.

STATEMENT BY KENNETH GIBSON AT BUSINESS MEN'S BREAKFAST  
Thursday, June 11, 1970, Robert Treat Hotel, Newark

For the third time in a little over four years, I come to ask that you give your vote to elect me the Mayor of Newark. The second time, and now, the third, I feel an increasing sense of urgency; not because of anything that has happened to me, but because of the progressive deterioration of the affairs of the City.

I have tried to discuss those things that are generally recognized as issues: the condition of our schools, burdensome taxes, the wasteful and irresponsible handling of tax funds, law enforcement and crime, overall ineffectiveness and inefficiency of public administration resulting in low employee morale with inadequate services to the public. I do not charge corruption in government, for, although grand juries do not lightly indict, the matter of guilt will be properly decided in the courts where it now rests. During the pendency of this issue, it is not a proper matter for public discussion.

But let us understand, and clearly, that the conditions resulting from deficiencies of the present administration are not really issues. They are problems. Issues are debatable. They can be argued pro and con. Surely no one is in favor of wasting public funds, or of deteriorating schools, or of a rising crime rate, or of lax public administration. Everybody who has any concern for his own welfare or that of the city is against these things. So they are problems, not issues, and problems must be understood and solved, not debated.

There is, therefore, only one issue. Which of the candidates now standing for election to the office of Mayor shows promise of solving these problems? The administration seeking re-election has made no progress in their solution during the past eight years. On the contrary, it has been directly responsible for compounding and increasing them. You might gather from statements out of the Mayor's office that these problems do not exist, or, at least, that he is not aware of their existence. There is no evidence that the present administration has the will or the capacity to solve them.

There is no quick and easy solution for any of them. But the solution of all of them lies in a thorough, honest, meticulous, responsible job of public administration. Doing such a job is not easy under any circumstances. The prospect of doing it under conditions now existing in Newark could be terrifying to any man. But I would not ask to undertake it unless I felt I could do it with the help of the most competent and experienced people I can find to work with me. Even with their help, I could not do it without the support, the understanding and, yes, the sympathy of the majority of the citizens of Newark. These things I ask of you and I will prove that I am worthy of them.

It will be hard and continuing work, much of it sheer drudgery. There will be difficult decisions as we thread our way through the demands and sometimes the conflicts of the diverse population of this city. In administering the affairs of the city of Newark, there will be no preferences, and but one standard to which I and those who work with me must and will conform. It is that every citizen will be accorded the same consideration as all others in all matters related to the public business.

The job of bringing Newark back to its proper place among the great cities of the country will be a long one, and progress may at first be slow. But I assure you that, if I am Mayor, there will be progress, and I will try to keep you advised of it. I will seek information, advice and counsel from many of you and from your various organizations. I hope you will give these to me freely and honestly, realizing that the ultimate decisions and courses of action are, and must be, my responsibility.

I know that many citizens feel that to elect me Mayor of Newark would be an adventure into the unknown. People fear the unknown. While I regret that this feeling exists, I am enough of a realist to understand the reasons for its presence. I am neither blind or deaf, so I know that my opponents in this campaign, and I use the plural advisedly, my opponents are doing everything they can, by rumor, innuendo, and outright lies, to increase this fear among you. This behavior violates every principle upon which our country is founded. But it is a fact of history that hatred and bigotry make easy alliance with corrupt government. I ask that you reject this appeal to fear. I assure you that these fears have no foundation.

The domestic history of this country records many events that have produced the tensions, mistrust and even hatreds that plague us now. To those citizens, whatever their national origin, race or color, who nurse this mistrust and hatred and find joy in heightening these tensions, I say that they feed a cancer that may ultimately destroy, not the body, but the mind. To those of you who are caught in this net, feel helpless to find the honest, decent, democratic way out of it, I say that though our ancestors may have sown the wind, we are not necessarily condemned to reap the whirlwind; though our fathers have eaten bitter fruit, their children's teeth are not necessarily set on edge. If we honestly try, we can shake off the dead hands of our inherited prejudices and our present frustrations. They are burdens we cannot continue to bear; luxuries we can no longer afford. The City of Newark will be the victim of our failure to get rid of them. I call this fact, with equal sharpness, to the attention of all the citizens of Newark.

I have said the job will be long. But there is one thing that will happen immediately on June 17th when the news media carry the word that Gibson has been elected Mayor of Newark. I say this not boastfully, but in all humility, for it will not really be a triumph for me, but for the City. The world will then know that the majority of the citizens of Newark had come to their senses and that the city has surmounted its first hurdle on the road back.

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Excerpts from this statement appeared in THE EVENING NEWS, June 11, 1970.